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Assassination panel head submits his resignation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez submitted his resignation as chairman of the House assassinations committee yesterday in his battle with chief counsel Richard A. Sprague, calling Sprague an unconscionable scoundrel.

Sprague made no comment.

The Texas Democrat submitted his resignation in a letter to Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill. The Speaker said the resignation would have to be considered by the full House, raising the prospect of a divisive floor fight.

O'Neill said he would not submit the resignation for a House verdict until he talked to Gonzalez.

House Democratic Leader Jim Wright told newsmen he believed that if Gonzalez insisted on resigning "the House probably would not vote to continue the investigation."

In his resignation letter, Gonzalez said that "it seems clear now that the House leadership is unwilling to offer me support."

"Yet I cannot bring myself to sign pay vouchers for an unscrupulous individual, an unconscionable scoundrel, and no power on earth can compel me to do so," Gonzalez wrote.

"Under the circumstances that now exist, I have no alternative but to resign from the Select Committee on Assassinations herewith."

The committee investigation of the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King has been battling internally since the day Congress convened in January.

The probe came to a virtual standstill Feb. 10, when Gonzalez announced he was firing Sprague for refusing to say which staff people could be fired to cut costs. All other members told Sprague to stay put, on grounds any firing has to be done by the committee, not the chairman alone.

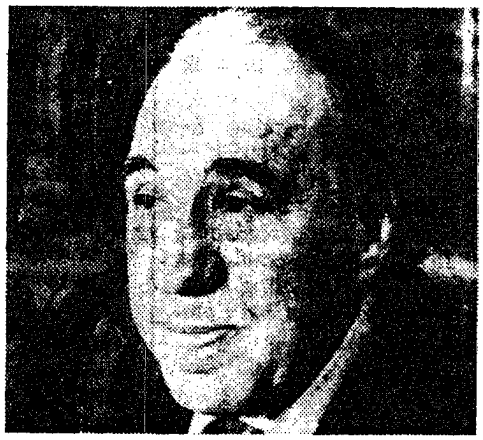
(Rep. Stewart B. McKinney (R-Conn.), who had said he would resign from the panel if Sprague were fired, said yesterday he was "extremely disappointed" at Gonzalez's resignation offer, United Press International reported.

("The blame for the personality conflicts which have brought the committee work to a grinding halt is not to be assumed by any one individual," McKinney said in a statement.

(But, he added, "The chairman's resignation cannot be viewed as the final blow to the committee's efforts. We still have the time and more importantly the responsibility to pick up the pieces and get on with the important task that awaits us.")

The House has given the committee only temporary life through the end of this month and must decide either to kill it or continue it for the two-year life of the Congress.

Gonzalez said in his letter to the Speaker that Sprague "refused to produce any kind of information on which the committee could make rational budget decisions."



REP. HENRY GONZALEZ
. . . calls Sprague a scoundrel

RICHARD SPRAGUE
. . . has no comment